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The Role of Women's Education in the Modern Nation-State

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Abstract: The authors examine the history of women's education and the rise of the modern nation-state. The paper seeks to correlate advances in women's education to the rising status of nations within the global state system. It does this through a historical and a cross-sectional analysis of women's education and national rankings in terms of such indicators as GDP, public health, rates of crime, technological innovation and government stability. The authors argue that the ability of a nation to compete within the global system is directly tied the educational attainment of its female population. We also put forth strategies that may be used to increase a government's willingness to invest in the education of its female population.

Keywords: *Politics, economics, women education, modern nation.*

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Introduction

In this paper we advocate for the expansion of women's education as an adjustment and strategy towards achieving change, discuss the potential barriers to such an expansion, and suggest strategies to overcome these barriers.

Let's begin with a few demographic patterns among women, globally.

Politics and Economics

- Women compose 40% of the global workforce, and own about 1% of the global wealth. In 2012 in India, 26% of women and 78% of men participated in the paid labor force. In Pakistan, these numbers were 22% and 80%, 54% and 81% in Bangladesh, and 78% and 86% in Nepal (Wilkins, 2016).
- In 2011, women held little over 19% of total global parliamentary seats. Unequal inheritance rights govern men and women in numerous countries (Wilkins, 2016).

Health

- "(I)t is estimated that 6 million women are missing every year...23 percent never born, 10 percent missing in early childhood, 21 percent in reproductive years, 38 percent above the age of 60" (Duflo, 2012, p. 1051).
- "(T)he death...of Indian women due to female infanticide and sex-selective abortion from 1980 to the present dwarfs by...fortyfold the death(s)...from all of India's wars since and including...independence" (Hudson et al., 2008/2009:8).
- "In Tanzania, "when...food is scarce, the murder of witches (almost always old women) is twice as likely" (Duflo, 2012: 1055).

While these facts paint a picture of a world at variance with the world we want, we know policy interventions improve social conditions.

- "A child who (grows) up malaria-free earns 50% more per year, for his entire adult life" (Banerjee and Duflo, 2011: 45). Strategies to increase the use of bed nets have been successful in reducing malaria infection.
- In South Africa when old age pensions were extended to cover blacks, "witch killings...dropped" (Duflo, 2012: 1066).
- In Indian villages where call centers were established, "girls age five to eleven were five (percent) more likely to be enrolled in school" because "educating girls" was seen to have "economic value" (Banerjee and Duflo, 2011:76-7).
- A longitudinal study on the expansion of the Indonesian school system in the early 1970s shows that every extra year of primary school (facilitated by new school construction) "raised wages by about 8 percent" (Banerjee and Duflo, 2011: 81-2).
- In Malawi and Kenya girls of families that received cash transfers to keep them in school were less likely to become pregnant than their peers (Banerjee and Duflo, 2011: 82).

Improving women's education globally improves the greater health of the world. We now discuss the influence of increasing education for females on the economy, health and politics of nation-states and the international order.

Education and the Economy

Investment in education has been tied to innovation. In *Social Change in the Modern Era* Daniel Chirot (1986) relates Britain's supremacy in the first two cycles of industrialism to their educated public. Educational investment led to U.S. and German leadership of the third industrial cycle. Educational investment sustained U.S. leadership into the fourth industrial cycle and, in the fifth cycle, the U.S. shares leadership with Japan—both of whom invested heavily in post WWII education. Education – writ large – drives innovation, employment and prosperity.

Other social scientists agree "knowledge is the generative force of economic development" (Brown, 2004: 137). Studies also suggest that investments in women's education, is as important or more important in spurring a country's economic development than investment in the education of men (Knowles et al., 2002:135). Hill and King (1993) found countries with female enrollment at 75% or less than male enrollment experienced a reduction of 25% in their GNP in comparison to countries with smaller gender gaps.

In their cross-national analysis of the link between women's education and economic performance, Knowles et al. (2002:118) cite Psacharopoulos' (1994:119) findings that the "rate of return due to female education is positive, and marginally higher than that to male education." Looking at long-term effects of educational gender gaps, Knowles et al. (2002:143) indicate that

such gaps are an impediment to economic development. Doepke and Terlilt's (2009) study found "a robust negative correlation...between the lack of (women's) rights (including education) and GDP per capita" (Duflo, 2012: 1059).

In their work "Religion and Female Educational Attainment" Norton and Tomal (2009: 961-2) suggest that "investing...in female education [increases] the stock of children's human capital" resulting in a "positive lagged effect" for society. Their argument echoes that of Klasen (1999) who believes that women's education creates educational synergies within families. Both studies suggest entire families benefit from a household where children can turn to either parent for study assistance.

Reinforcing classroom lessons increases the chance children will be high academic performers. High school graduates with scores that were a "standard deviation" higher in "mathematics...translates into 12 percent higher annual earnings" (Hanusheck and Woessmann, 2008:616). Nations with "one country level standard deviation higher test performance, [experience] around one percentage point higher annual growth" (Hanusheck and Woessmann, 2008: 633). Global Partners for Education estimate developing countries "lose more than \$1 billion a year by failing to educate girls" (Wilkins, 2016: 160).

At the corporate level, we also see the benefits of women's education. Kristof and WuDunn (2009:239) cite studies demonstrating that "public companies (with) more women executives consistently perform better than those with fewer women" (Kristof and WuDunn, 2009" 239).

While there is clear empirical support for the assertion that educating women contributes to the economic well-being of households and nations, there is a lag between initial investments and demonstrable benefits. Policy advocates and policy makers must engender sober expectations among their constituents to ensure continued support for the expansion and improvements of educational systems and for the education of women.

Women's education is key to the economic advancement of countries in the modern era. "(C)ountries that do not fully capitalize on one-half of their human resources are...undermining their competitive potential" (Hunt, 2007:112).

Education and Health

In addition to economic benefits born of women's education, the education of women is also closely correlated with an array of public health indicators, with early education shown to be especially important (Elo, 2009).

Fertility

A vast literature demonstrates a strong relationship between educational attainment and fertility. This relationship exists across space and time. In "The Demography of South Asia from the 1950s to the 2000s," Veron et al. (2008) compare socio-demographic characteristics of South Asia with other regions. Sub-Sahara Africa and South Asia have the lowest adult literacy rates and the highest fertility rates, while East Asia/Pacific and OECD countries reflect the highest adult literacy rates and the lowest fertility rates. "(M)ore educated women have fewer children" (Vernon et al. 2008:41).

In *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide* (2009), Kristoff and WuDunn point to the effects of an 1870 education reform in England mandating compulsory education for boys and girls. This was followed by a decline of fertility throughout the 1870s.

In the modern era, Osili and Long (2007) analyzed the expansion of education in Nigeria, beginning in 1976 and found that each "additional year of schooling reduce(d) the number of

children born before age 25 by 0.26" (p. 23). They (2007) note that their findings are consistent with Ainsworth (1996) study of 14 sub-Saharan countries that found a significant relationship between increased educational attainment for females and a reduction of fertility in 13 of the 14 countries (Osili and Long, 2007).

A contributing factor in the reduction of fertility is the role played by a decrease in early births. Education reduces early marriage and sexual activity. In their analysis of the effects of Nigeria's educational expansion, Osili and Long (2007:17) found an overall reduction of 1.09 births for girls benefitting from educational opportunities including "a 16 percent reduction in early births." With most births occurring before age 25, narrowing the span of early life procreative activity reduces fertility. In their study of South Asia, Veron et al. (2008:35) report education is the most telling factor in fertility differences noted in surveys conducted since 2000.

In their study of fertility of Iran, Lutz et al. (2009:2) examine the "interplay between female education and family planning that resulted in the world's most rapid fertility decline." Between 1980 and 2006, Iran's total fertility rate (TFR) declined from 7.0 to 1.9. The higher one's educational attainment, the lower one's fertility rate (Lutz et al.). Fertility rates among illiterate women also declined sharply from a high of 7.3 in 1986 to 3.0 in 2000 (Lutz et al., 2009:14).

Infant Mortality

Numerous studies correlate women's education and infant mortality. In "Democracy and Gender Inequality in Education: A Cross-National Examination," David Brown (2004:137) cites a longitudinal World Bank study which notes that "countries that achieved universal primary education for boys in 1965 but lagged...in educating girls had about twice the infant mortality...rates in 1985 of countries with smaller gender gaps." In their study of South Asia, Veron et al. (2008:54) report that "in India, (for) children under one, mortality rate varies by 44 points according to whether the mothers have received no education (70%) or more than 12 years (26%)". Pamuk and her colleagues (2011) study of 43 developing countries, find that "relative to mothers with no education...infant death decreases by 10 percent for those with only some primary school, by 22 percent with primary school completion (and) over a third for those with some secondary school" (p. 644).

Women's education also has a community effect. Pamuk has shown that "births in communities where schooling of reproductive-age women averaged between 4 and 8 years show a risk of infant death 27 percent lower than those in communities where the average educational attainment was less than 4 years" (Pamuk et al., 2011:646). Women of lower educational attainment also experience lower infant mortality rates in communities with higher levels of female educational attainment. Pamuk et al. (2011:639) explain this by an "imitative effect"--whereby less-educated women model the health related behaviors of the broader community."

The relationship between higher education and lower infant mortality is partially explained by better understandings of health facilitated by education. More educated women also have greater agency, including more autonomous movement "and...use of health services" (p. 655) another behavior imitated by less well-educated women (Pamuk et al. 2011).

Higher levels of women's educational attainment thus appear to be more important than community wealth in terms of reducing the risk of infant mortality. In fact, Pamuk and her associates (2011:651) attribute the higher risk of infant deaths in rural area to "rural populations being less educated and poorer than their urban counterparts."

Maternal Mortality

Globally, there is “one maternal death every minute...99% occur in poor countries” (Kristoff and WuDunn, 2009:98). In sub-Saharan Africa, women have a “1 in 31 chance of dying from complications due to pregnancy or childbirth” (Duflo, 2012: 1056). This ratio drops to 1 in 4,300 in developed countries that invest in education.

Maternal Mortality Rates (MMR) are influenced by a range of factors, a significant predictor being “age of first marriage” (Wilkins, 2016:11, Duflo, 2012). Young female bodies are prone to a range of complications including death, in all stages of child bearing. And similar to the relationship we see with infant mortality rates, maternal mortality rates decrease with increased female education (Duflo, 2012).

Life Expectancy

Since life expectancy is set by averaging expected length of life for all societal members, extending life from birth and increasing the number of women living through their reproductive years, lengthens life expectancy for all. Further, decreases in fertility are shown to cause intergenerational improvements in education and health (Wilkins, 2016; Pamuk et al., 2011) and, as the “...proportion of family income invested in each child's human capital stock increases, [this results] in increased per capita income” (Norton and Tomal, 2009: 963).

Rising female educational attainment increases the likelihood of childhood immunizations, which increases life expectancy (Veron, et al., 2008). Educated women have a better understanding of nutrition, which is a key to the physical and cognitive development of children (Banerjee and Duflo, 2011). And, educated mothers are likely to understand the benefits of Iodized salt shown to significantly increase the long-term cognitive functioning of children (Kristof and WuDunn, 2009). They are also more likely to understand the importance of using chlorine to purify unsafe sources of drinking water (Banerjee and Duflo, 2011).

As fertility declines and population growth slows, chances for nation-state “socio-political stability” (Dyson, 2012: 87) increases, as does states’ ability to address an array of social needs like health facilities, educational institutions, and law enforcement, all of which contribute to longer life expectancies. And as median age increases, countries become “more democratic” (Dyson, 2012: 94), with adults desiring more “voice in political affairs” (p. 86). To the extent that democracy increases the sensitivity of governments to public concerns, officials are likely to address factors contributing to constituent morbidity and mortality (Banerjee and Duflo, 2011).

Politics

Democracy

Aging populations are more inclined to democracy and the “prospects for democracy...rise as the proportion of young adults in the work-age population falls” (Dyson, 2012:84). As mentioned, an increase in female education raises the age of first marriage and first birth and reduces fertility, improving the health and well-being of children, extending life expectancy and raising the median age of society. Younger populations are more inclined to violence. “For each percentage-point increase of youth in the adult population...the risk of conflict increases by more than 4 percent” (Kristoff and WuDunn, 2009: 158). As “people age and gain prosperity they are less likely to risk death by joining insurgencies” (Thyne, 2006: 738). A strong system of education, directed at both males and females, has a “pacifying effect on civil war” (Thyne 2006:743).

In their review of longitudinal data drawn from 120 countries, Lutz et al. (2009:17) find a “statistically significant positive relationship in which countries with more education tend to

have a higher index of political rights." At the national level, "women's presence in politics increases the amount of attention given to social welfare, legal protection, and transparency in government and business" (Hudson et al., 2008/09: 27-8). In "Let Women Rule," Hunt (2007:111) cites research suggesting "countries with a high number of women in parliament enjoy lower levels of corruption (and that) women are less likely to be involved in bribery." Upon her election as Liberia's president "Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf prioritized the eradication of corruption, (firing) the entire Finance Ministry" (Hunt, 2007: 112).

It is important to consider the point raised In *Democracy and Gender Inequality in Education*, in which David Brown (2004:138) notes that "the processes nations use to recruit and select their chief executives strongly influence opportunities for women (and) is the most salient feature of the democratic process." Systems that choose their political leaders through universal suffrage, improve women's status as their support is sought by political parties and by politicians.

Accepting women as elected officials can be normalized by designating seats for women in legislative councils. India's reservation policy, which designated a proportion of village council seats for women, diminished "the bias against women and (their) leadership" and increased the number of people willing to vote for women "after the seats lose their reserve status" (Duflo, 2012: 1071-2). An investment in women's education can help to prepare women for these leadership roles.

Inter and Intra National Relations

International relations are also affected by the education of women. Hudson contends that "(S)tates exhibiting high levels of gender equality also exhibit lower levels of violence in international crises and disputes" (Hudson et al., 2008/9: 30).

Whether approached from an essentialist or constructivist perspective, much cultural weight is placed upon motherhood and the strong ties this engenders within women for children. These ties are a deep reservoir that women draw upon in their efforts to combat violence. One regional group of women that succeeded in combating violence is the Naga Mothers Association and the Shed No More Blood campaign in India. Women have also been key players in the Kashmiri Association of the Parents of the Disappeared (Menon, 2015).

South African psychologist Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, who helped establish the Truth and Reconciliation Commission believes: "women have the power and emotional inclination to hold onto hope when...negotiating with former enemies" (Hunt, 2007: 113). Hunt adds that women "come to the table with a different perspective on conflict resolution" (p. 113). The education of women can only help to further decrease levels of violence and improve inter and intra national relations.

Barriers to Women's Education

Patriarchy

One barrier to women's education is patriarchy that bifurcates space on the basis of sex and ascribes roles with behaviors deemed sex appropriate (Illich, 1982). Role enactment gives life to the structure of patriarchy (Giddens, 1984). Given its importance in determining social life, we will examine patriarchy in detail.

In "Toward a Definition of Patriarchy," Hartmann (2004:143) suggests patriarchy is a "set of...relations between men" with "a material base" generating "interdependence and solidarity...that enable (men) to dominate women." This solidarity crosses class, race, caste and

religious lines. Men depend on “each other to maintain (male) domination” (Hartmann, 2004:143). Men need women to bear and raise children leading men to control female sexuality. In *Headscarves and Hymans: Why the Middle East Needs a Sexual Revolution*, Mona Eltanhawy (2015:80,82) explains how control over women’s sexuality is wrapped within a “purity culture” that “leads men and women to blame women” for their harassment and rape. In her book *Intercourse*, Andrea Dworkin (1987) argues sexual intercourse often is expressed as an act of domination, used to reinforce patriarchal structures. In such instances, sexual encounters are meant to defile, demean, debase and break the spirit of the women involved.

In “Cartographies of Struggle: Third World Feminism and the Politics of Feminism,” Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1991:9) discusses how imperial or colonial culture transformed local patriarchies to meet their economic objectives. “(P)atriarchal practices were shaped to serve the economic interests of both the land-owning classes and the colonial state.” For Mohanty (p:22) “liberal capitalism...is dependent upon and supported by...the patriarchal household.”

While some earlier civilizations were centered on the female/goddess (Eisler, 1988), since its ascension as a system of power, all manner of traditions, customs, and laws reinforce patriarchy, including religion - “men...use women's faith to imprison them” (Eltanhawy, 2014:14), politics – e.g., the U.S. Constitution “gendered” civic membership (Ritter, 2006:3), with entire cultural systems stigmatizing women as deviant, dangerous and in need of control (Dworkin 2000; Schur 1984).

In “The Heart of the Matter: The Security of Women and the Security of States,” Hudson et al. (2008/9) use evolutionary psychology to explain patriarchy’s origins. In this paradigm gender is the “primary formative fixed difference experienced in human society, and sexual reproduction is the strongest evolutionary drive in human social arrangements” (pp. 10-12). Reproductive fitness is causally related to the emergence of structures, which privilege a male’s ability to dominate females and also requires his domination of other males. “Patriarchy has its...origins in male violence” (Hudson et al, p. 14). Women accede to male dominance to gain protection from killer males.

While the threat of killer males may have diminished in modern societies, women’s survival still requires a system of provision, i.e., means through which their well-being (and perhaps that of their children) is assured. As a route to alternative systems of provision, it stands to reason that women’s education is retarded in societies whose religious traditions align with patriarchal structures.

In “Religion and Female Educational Attainment,” Norton and Tomal (2009) examine data from 97 countries and find statistically significant negative relationships for female educational investment within Hindus, Muslim and ethno-religionist communities. Their research suggests religion alone “can explain more than one-third of the cross-country variation in female labor force participation” (p. 967).

In “The Political Economy of Women’s Support for Fundamentalist Islam,” Blaydes and Linzer (2008) examine how educational attainment influences women’s relationships with Islam. In their research they utilize a World Values Survey, with more than 20,000 Muslim respondents from 18 countries. Blaydes and Linzer share Helen Hardacre’s (1993) list of explanations of why Muslim women may hold to oppressive fundamentalist beliefs including “fear of dislocation...inability to earn sufficient wages...lack of education and exposure to outside contacts...concern over male reprisal for non-conformity...fear of divine disapproval and difficulty in making choices about things...that they were raised to believe (are) inevitable” (p. 581). In their analysis they suggest that “(w)omen with limited economic opportunities...are

more likely to take on fundamentalist and traditionalist belief systems (to) enhance their value as...marriage partners (2008:577).” Thus, life within marriage is their only option for meeting material needs. Women who were married and unemployed had the most “fundamentalist beliefs—at all levels of education (Blaydes and Linzer, 1993, p. 595).

Where gender is “linked to the attribution of and control over resources,” (Wilkins, 2016: 22) changes in resource allocation and control threaten those privileged by traditional arrangements. This is borne out by Nelson and Oldmixon’s (2017) study of the transformation of women’s economic opportunities and increasing violence in Bangladesh. As women’s educational achievement and employment options increase “their support for traditionalist notions of gender roles decreases, even though they may...retain a strong sense of religiosity” (p. 596). Moghadam (1994) finds similar patterns in her study of Iranian women.

Poverty

Providing high quality, universal, public education challenges all nation-states, but especially developing countries with swelling youth populations and governments unable to meet their educational needs (Lutz et al., 2009). Add logistical challenges of holding teachers accountable (e.g., “50 percent of teachers in Indian public schools are not in front of a class at the time they should be” (Banderjee and Duflo, 2011: 74) and outmoded educational techniques (Banderjee and Duflo, 2011, Norton and Tomal, 2009), and you have systems that fail to meet the needs of school age populations (Thyne, 2006).

Poverty also expresses itself at the family level. Families withhold their children from school because they need the income of their children’s labor (Brown, 2004). Often, children come to school hungry and unable to concentrate, requiring the added costs of nutrition programs (Hanushek and Woessmann, 2008).

Models and Allies – Preliminary Thoughts

There are many challenges in advocating for increasing investment in women’s education. While studying the social benefits of increasing women’s educational attainment, we came across some program models, role models, and potential allies that could inform or assist in efforts to expand women’s education. Here, we present a few of these.

South Africa significantly reduced absenteeism among its female students by providing them with school uniforms. Simple enough.

Brazil’s Bolsa Familia is one of many global programs that increases student enrollment by direct cash payments to the families, eliminating the choice faced by many parents of securing household finances or meeting the educational needs of their children.

Innovations in women’s education can come from anywhere. One particularly interesting example is the India-based Barefoot College that operates in Asia, Africa, and Latin America (Kristoff and WuDunn, 2009, p. 238) which gives women six months of engineering training before sending them back to their home villages as solar or hydraulic engineers.

We can look to Iran, which reduced its fertility rates from 7.0 to 1.9 in the course of a single generation, while increasing female secondary school completion from a “tiny fraction to more than 2/3s in 30 years (Lutz et al., 2009).

External organizations such as Global Partnerships for Education, Connect to Learn, Azim Premji and Pratham can assist with funding, technology and education reform models.

Organizations such as Gram Vikas, the Wallace Global Fund, and Injaz have tools to address rural health, improve civil society, and to ensure school graduates will meet the needs of their local communities.

Change is possible. Look to leadership of those in Tunisia who wrote the first Arab constitution that recognized men and women as equals (Eltahawy, 2015). Look also to Moroccan King Muhammad VI who supported a 2004 family law “compatible with Sharia and that gave women equal rights” (Hunt, 2007: 117).

We could turn to religion for inspiration such as the role women played in the early Christian church (Eisler, 1988). Then, there’s Mohammad, who “never beat a woman” (Eltahawy, 2015:145) and “whose last sermon emphasized love and respect for women” (p. 161). Think of his first wife Khadijah who financed his early business interests (Koehler, 2014) and his youngest wife Aisha who “recorded 2,210 hadith, or recollections of Muhammad used...to...clarify Koranic teachings (Eltahanwy, 2015: 153).

At the Afghan Institute of Learning “moderate passages from the Koran are taught, so (women) can direct their husbands to passages that call for respect for women” (Kristof and WuDunn, 2009: 63-4). Might we use the Islamic teaching that “couples should only have as many children as they can afford” (Lutz et al., 2009: 26) in advocating for women’s education?

There are numerous women we can point to who made a difference in the lives of their communities, including Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan, Queen Rania of Jordan and Sheikha Mozah, of Qatar.

There is Roshaneh Zafar and her success in Pakistani microfinance and Pakistani human rights activist Asma Jahangir whose recent death reverberated around the world. And think of women such as Mukhtar Mai’s who transformed the tragedy of her rape and the rape of her brother into opening schools (Kristoff and WuDunn, 2009). The force of women can also be seen in the likes of Mahila Mandal in India, which reduced domestic violence by village women en masse to the home of “any woman... being beaten by her husband, (forcing) domestic abusers to temporarily leave the home” (Hudson et al., 2008/9: 18).

In an era of mass communication, outlets abound through which people can send egalitarian messages. Even without intent, talk shows have helped to empower women in Bangladesh (Wilkins, 2016) and soap operas in Brazil have contributed to a reduction of fertility (Banderjee and Duflo, 2011). Think of the effect sophisticated, intentional and culturally sensitive messaging can have in increasing investment in women’s education.

In Support of Universal Education

We know that effective policy messages need to (1) inform; (2) be attractive and simple; (3) and, use credible sources (Edmonds and Wareburton, 2016). Stating the familial and societal benefits of women’s education in a succinct and attractive fashion will inform the public. If we engage credible allies within politics, religion, sports, the mass media, and in families, it is more likely people will hear and act upon our message. And the message *must* be all-inclusive.

Women’s education should be pitched as a part of the need for universal education, the benefits of which will be shared by all, regardless of sex, race, ethnicity, religion, class, caste, or geographic region. In *Bridge Over the Racial Divide*, William Julius Wilson (1999) tells us that to enlist the aid of white U.S. citizens in the eradication of U.S. black poverty, whites must experience benefits. To enlist the support of men in the education of women, the benefits to men must be clear and tangible. All will benefit by expanding women’s education, including our most vulnerable citizens.

We serve as role models in families, religious communities, clubs and universities. How close are our groups, i.e., the groups to which we belong, to realizing universal education for its members? How can move them closer?

There are organizations that we can turn to for support. We need to determine what is required to achieve high quality, universal education and work to achieve it. We must be persistent at all times and at all levels, because quality education will always be under attack, just as truth and civility are currently under attack in our country.

Women's education is a social justice issue. A just society (which includes gender justice) has healthier citizens, is more prosperous and is more likely to be at peace with itself and with its neighbors. Let's work to bring this into being everywhere.

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Jammie Price is a retired Professor of Sociology from the University of North Carolina system. She taught applied sociology, research methods, data analysis, internships, social problems and introduction to sociology. She served as editor of the Journal of Applied Social Science for 10 years.

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